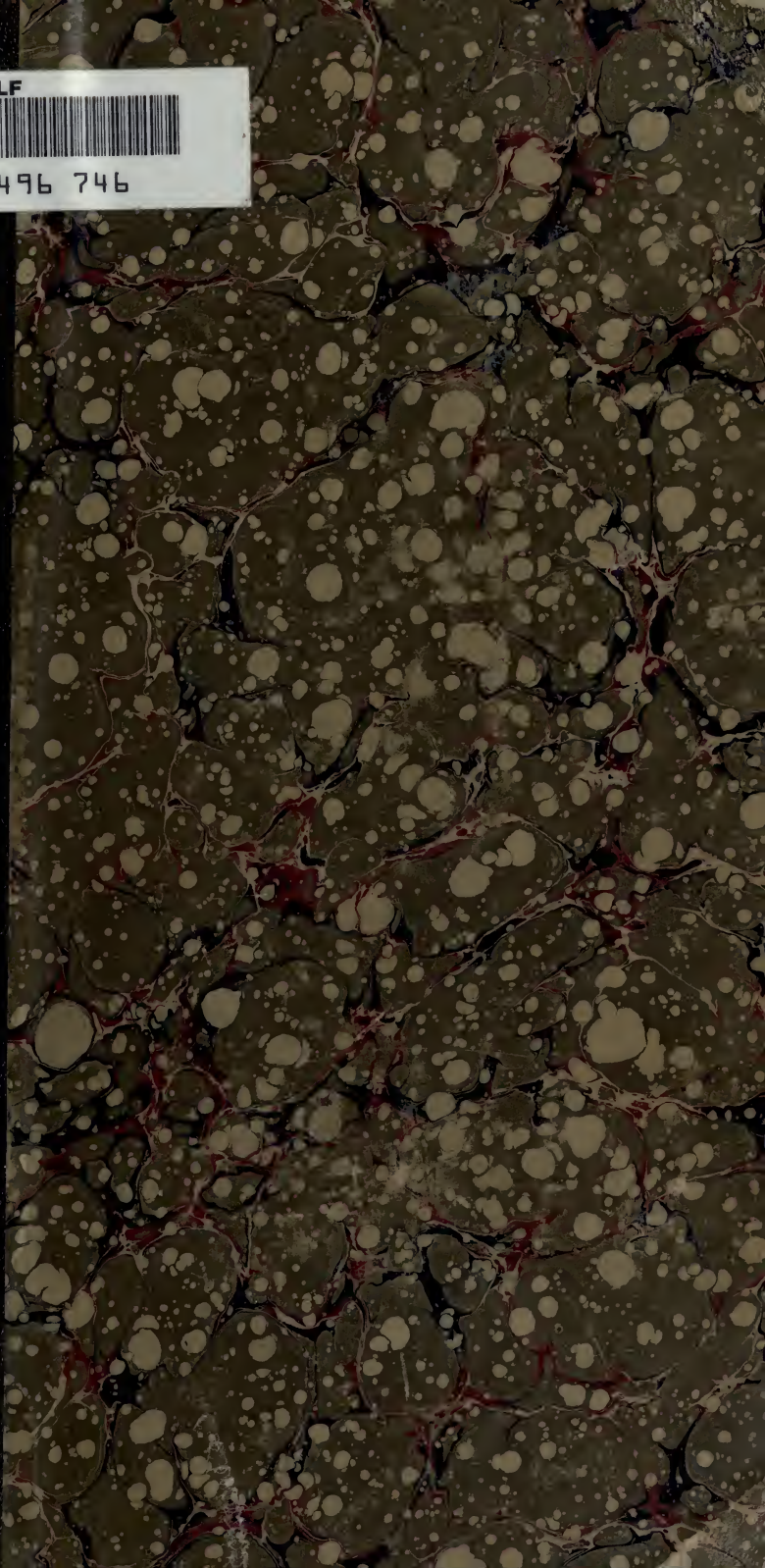


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## THE RELIGION OF THE DAKOTAS.

### CHAPTER SIX OF MR. LYND'S MANUSCRIPT.

A STRANGER, coming among the Dakotas for the first time, and observing the endless variety of objects upon which they bestow their devotion, and the manifold forms which that worship assumes, at once pronounces them *Pantheists*. A further acquaintance with them convinces him that they are Pantheists of no ordinary kind—that their pantheism is negative as well as positive, and that the engraftments of religion are even more numerous than the true branches. Upon a superficial glance he sees nought but an inextricable maze of Gods, Demons, Spirits, beliefs and counter-beliefs, earnest devotion and reckless skepticism, prayers, sacrifices and sneers, winding and intermingling with each other, until a labyrinth of pantheism and skepticism results, and the Dakota, with all his infinity of deities appears a creature of irreligion. One speaks of the Medicine Dance with respect, while another smiles at the name—one makes a religion of the Raw Fish Feast, whilst another stands by and laughs at his performance—and others, listening to the supposed revelations of the Circle Dance, with reverend attention, are sneered at by a class who deny *in toto* the *wakan* nature of that ceremony. What one believes another appears to deny; and though pantheism rears itself prominent above all, yet the skepticism of the one part seems to offset the earnest devotion of the other.

To such an observer, indeed, the living faith seems wanting in the mind of a Dakota. He has been told that such



or such a belief is true; and he receives it as the living do sweet odors in a dream—an impression is made, but it may be nothing which made it. He appears to deem the senses everything, the ideal nothing; and though there is no more imaginative being in existence than the Indian, yet it seems an essential idealism, having reference only to reality. He will play with ideas in a practical form—follow the most fantastic trains of thought with a ready vigor and strong originality; but the train vanishes, and the amusement is over. Express as truth a single thought beyond his reason, or in apparent conflict with the evidences of his senses or his own hereditary beliefs, and a stereotyped expression of incredence will invariably pass over him.

Such, upon a rude acquaintance, appears to be the religious character and belief of the Dakotas. Well might the question be asked—what is the religion of this people? Were this all that a deeper investigation showed, the religion of the Dakotas would indeed be a problem of no easy solution. But the secrets of no religion are reached by a mere knowledge of its forms. The deeper sources must be gained ere its character be known; and to judge even of many of the modern Christian ceremonies by outward appearances could be productive of only false results.

In common with all the nations of the earth the Dakotas believe in a Wakantanka or *Great Spirit*. But this Being is not alone in the universe. Numbers of minor divinities are scattered throughout space, some of whom are placed high in the scale of power. Their ideas concerning the Great Spirit appear to be, that He is the creator of the world, and has existed from all time. But after creating the world and all that is in it, He sank into silence, and since then has failed to take any interest in the affairs of this our planet. They never pray to Him, for they deem Him too far away to hear them, or as not being concerned in their affairs. No sacrifices are made to Him, nor dances

in His honor. Of all the spirits, He is the Great Spirit: but His power is only latent or negative. They swear by Him at times, but more commonly by other divinities.\*

\* No question has more puzzled—and, it may be said, unnecessarily—those who have gone among the Sioux, than that of, *who the Wakantanka or Great Spirit is?* Though the name is frequently heard, yet it does not appear to be well understood even by the Sioux themselves: and from the fact that they offer no praise, sacrifices, or feasts to that Divinity, many have gone so far as to imagine that the *name, even, was introduced to their acquaintance by the whites.*

Nothing could be more unfounded than this. Not to mention the absurdity of the proposition that so radical an idea as that of one spirit being superior to and more powerful than all others—an idea at the bottom of and pervading all religions, even of the most barbarous—should meet with an exception in the Dakotas; there are internal proofs of its native origin, both in the testimony of the people, and in the use of the word itself. The Dakotas themselves aver that Wakantanka (the Great Spirit) has always been held divine among them—though they cannot call to mind the time when He ever was worshipped, and acknowledge that but little is known or thought about him.

We have already seen that the word Wakantanka is of frequent occurrence in the *Wakan-Wohanpi* or Sacred Feasts, and that it is used interchangeably with the Algonquin word *Maneto* or Great Spirit. This alone is proof enough, but there are other proofs. In the Medicine Dance, which, though very modern as far as the Dakotas are concerned, was introduced among them long years before any mission reached them, the Wakantanka is expressly declared to have been the creator of the world. Further proof is not required.

The idea of a Great Spirit is a fixed one in their minds; but they look upon him as a Negative Good, with no attributes whatever of a positive or active character; and when they call upon him to witness anything, as they now frequently do in conversing with whites, it is as *the God of the white man* that they do so, and not as the God of the Dakotas.

With regard to the attributes of the Wakantanka, as they are all latent or unexercised, so they attract no notice from the Dakotas: for why should they address one who, they imagine, cannot hear them, and who takes no interest in them actively? They certainly would be far from showing that "humanity has a common character," if they did so. The *Wakantanka* of the Dakotas is, indeed, an exact prototype of the ancient Brahm of the Hindoos: and no one will be so rash as to hazard the asser-



The Divinities of Evil among the Dakotas may be called legion. Their special delight is to make man miserable or to destroy him. Demons wandering through the earth causing sickness and death—spirits of evil ready to pounce upon and destroy the unwary—the Thunder-Bird scattering his fires here and there, striking down whom he lists—spirits of the darkness, spirits of the light—spirits of earth, air, fire, and water surround him upon every side, and with but one great governing object in view, the misery and destruction of the human race. The wanderer is lured by will o' wisp to dark marshes and obscure places but to be strangled; the benighted traveller is tormented by spirits along the way, till he lies down in despair to die: the stray lodge becomes the delight of the wild *Ohnogica*, and women with child are but torturing sports for the vengeful *Anogite*. All their divinities, with the exception of the Wakantanka or Great Spirit, take especial delight in deeds of darkness, and are emphatically workers in the night. When the hail has destroyed all their crops and famine is upon them; when, in the deep snows of winter, the buffaloes, thick around their lodges, are seized with a sudden panic, and run for days with their noses to the wind, rendering it impossible to follow; when a whole camp is struck down by some epidemic, and fear and dread are in their midst: then it is that the *Genii* delight to torture and pursue, to pull, wrack, tear, and rend them with all sorts of tricks and inventions, till their wrath is appeased or the people can escape. The ubiquitous *Unktomi* tortures them in their hunger by bringing herds of buffaloes near the camp, which they no sooner start to pursue than he drives away by means of a black wolf and a white crow: *Canotidan* draws

tion that because the present Hindoostanese worship minor deities—almost entirely ignoring Brahm—therefore *the Hindoos derived their knowledge of Brahm from some other nation*. Yet the one supposition is no less ridiculous than the other.

the hungry hunters to the depths of the wood by imitating the voices of animals, or by the nefarious "cico! cico!"\* when he scares them out of their senses by showing himself to them; and the vindictive *Iya* drives them back from the hunt to the desolation of their own lodges.

Their religious system gives to everything a spirit or soul. Even the commonest stones, sticks, and clays have a spiritual essence attached to them which must needs be revered—for these spirits, too, vent their wrath upon mankind. Indeed, there is no object, however trivial, but has its spirit. The whole material or visible world, as well as the invisible, is but one immense theatre for spirits and fiends to play their torments upon mankind. Frequently the devout Dakota will make images of bark or stone, and, after painting them in various ways and putting sacred down upon them, will fall down in worship before them, praying that all danger may be averted from him and his. It must not be understood, however, that the Dakota is an idolater. It is not the *image* which he worships, any more than it is the *cross* which is worshipped by Catholics, but the *spiritual essence* which is represented by that image, and which is supposed to be ever near it. The essentially physical cast of the Indian mind (if I may be allowed the expression) requires some outward and tangible representation of things spiritual, before he can comprehend them. The God must be present, by image or in person, ere he can offer up his devotions.

This system of giving to everything a spiritual essence, seems to have prevailed among all the Indian tribes both of North and South America.

"The Peruvians believed that everything on earth had its archetype or idea—its *mother*, as they emphatically

\* The form of invitation to a feast.

styled it—which they held sacred, as, in some sort, its spiritual essence.”\*

Similar to this is the general Dakota belief that each *class* of animals or objects of a like kind, possesses a peculiar guardian divinity, which is the mother archetype. The resemblance of this to the Egyptian doctrine is not unnoticed.†

Sexuality is a prominent feature in the religion of the Dakotas. Of every species of divinity (with the exception of the Wakantanka or Great Spirit) there is a plurality, part male and part female. This belief, which was also a part of the ancient Egyptian creed, is common, as far as I can learn, to all the Dakota nations. The first Unktehi (Sea God) for instance, created from a rib by the Wakantanka himself, was a male, and the second one was feminine. From these two sprung all the numerous Unktehi, both male and female, that are now scattered through the waters and upon the face of the earth. Yet the Dakota carries this idea farther than I understand the ancient Egyptian to have done; for even the spirits which are supposed to dwell in earth, twigs, and other inanimate substances, are invested with distinctions of sex.

To the human body the Dakotas give *four spirits*. The first is supposed to be a spirit of the body, and dies with the body. The second is a spirit which always remains with or near the body. Another is the soul which accounts for the deeds of the body, and is supposed by some to go to the south, by others, to the west, after the death of the body. The fourth always lingers with the small bundle of hair of the deceased, kept by the relatives until

\* Prescott's Conquest of Peru, book i., chap. 3.

† Among the ancient Egyptians each animal was supposed to be under the protection of some god. Hence they represent each god by a human body, with the head of the animal sacred to it. True Christian hieroglyphics of such character are not lacking even at the present day.



they have a chance to throw it into the enemy's country, when it becomes a roving, restless spirit, bringing death and disease to the enemy whose country it is in.

From this belief arose the practice of wearing four scalp-feathers for each enemy slain in battle, one for each soul.\*

With regard to the place of abode of the four souls of men—though they believe that the true soul that goes *south* or *west* is immortal—they have no idea, nor do they appear to have any particular care as to what may become of them after death. Like the primitive Hebrews, they appear to be looking solely to temporal blessings. It may be remarked, that "*the happy hunting grounds*," supposed to belong to every Indian's future, are no part of the Dakota creed—though individual Dakotas may have learned something like it from the white men among them who are impregnated with the idea.

The belief in the powers of some Dakotas to call up and converse with the spirits of the dead is strong in some, though not general. They frequently make feasts to these spirits and elicit information from them of distant relatives or friends. Assembling at night in a lodge, they smoke, put out the fire, and then, drawing their blankets over their heads, remain singing in unison in a low key until the spirit gives them a picture. This they pretend the spirit does; and many a hair-erecting tale is told of spirits' power to reveal, and the after confirmation.

The following will give the reader a view of this spirit-power they deem some to possess: In the winter of 1830 were encamped at Big Stone Lake a large body of Sioux, composed mainly of Sisitons, Ithanktons, and Mdewakantons. Buffalo were plenty, the winter mild, and feasting,

\*Some Sioux claim a *fifth* scalp-feather, averring that there is a *fifth spirit* which enters the body of some animal or child after death. As far as I am aware this belief is not general, though they differ in their accounts of the spirits of man, even in the number.

dancing, and gambling were in full play among them. A war party was set on foot against the Ojibwas, who occupied the country about Fort Ripley; and all the young braves and many of the older men joined in and started. The Mdewakantons were encamped eight miles below the rest of the Sioux; but on the evening of the second day after the war party had started, just as night was falling, a panic siezed the whole body of Sioux, and, Sisitons and all, as if by a preconcerted movement, they struck their tents and moved on to an island in the lake in huddled confusion. They were now altogether, and no apparent danger, but still the panic remained. Finally, an old woman, ninety-two years of age, said that she would consult the spirits. In their fear they were ready to listen to anything; so a lodge was cleared, a small fire kindled in it from flint and steel, and the old woman entered, closing the door after her tightly. Seating herself she lighted the black pipe, and after smoking for a time laid it aside, beat out the fire, and then drawing her blanket over her head she commenced to sing in a low key in anticipation of a revelation from the spirits. Crowds of women and children, together with a few old men, surrounded the lodge, waiting anxiously for what should follow. Suddenly the old woman was heard to cry out, as if in extreme terror; and hastily throwing open the door, they found her lying upon the ground in a swoon. On coming to she related that she had seen a terrible picture. Fourteen men arose up from the west, bloody and without their scalps, and facing these rose up great numbers from the east, thirteen of whom appeared with blood upon their forms and apparently about falling.

Two days afterwards the Sioux came home with fourteen scalps, but with thirteen of their own party on biers. The Ojibwas had come west to make war, but seeing the very large Sioux war trail had turned to go east again, and the Sioux *vice versa*. Thus the Sioux were coming west and



the Ojibwa going east—which confirmed the old woman's revelation in every respect.

Certain men also profess to have an unusual amount of the *wakan* or divine principle in them. By it they assume the working of miracles, laying on of hands, curing of the sick, and many more wonderful operations. It is this *wakan* in men which operates in the *powwowing* of the Dakotas. Some of these persons pretend to a recollection of former states of existence, even naming the particular body they formerly lived in. Others, again, assert their power over nature, and their faculty of seeing into futurity and of conversing with the deities. A third class will talk of the particular animal whose body they intend to enter when loosed from their present existence.

In endeavoring to sustain these pretensions they occasionally go through performances which are likely to deceive the ignorant throng.

At a feast made in honor of *Heyoka*, the anti-natural God, they assemble in a lodge with tall conical hats, nearly naked, and painted in strange style. Upon the fire is placed a huge kettle full of meat, and they remain seated around the fire smoking, until the water in the kettle begins to boil, which is the signal for the dance to commence. They dance and sing around it excitedly, plunging their hands into the boiling water, and seizing large pieces of hot meat, which they devour at once. The scalding water is thrown over their backs and legs, at which they never wince, complaining that it is cold. Their skin is first deadened, as I am credibly informed, by rubbing with a certain grass; and they do not, in reality, experience any uneasiness from the boiling water—a fact which gives their performances great mystery in the eyes of the uninitiated.

At other times a lodge will be entirely cleared of everything in it, and one of these *faquirs* will produce ropes and thongs, desiring some of the stronger men to tie him

tightly. The tying is usually done by those not connected with the performance, and some of these affirm that they have tied their arms, elbows, and feet so tightly as to break the skin, and then tied the feet to the hands and enveloped almost the whole body in knots and twists that it would seem impossible to undo. The person thus tied is put into the empty lodge by himself, and the door made fast from without. No one is allowed to touch or go near the lodge, and the Indian thus bound remains singing alone for a few minutes, when he cries out, the door is opened, and he comes forth free from bonds.

This ceremony is performed to obtain an interview with *Takushkanshkan* (the moving God), who is supposed to release them. It is looked upon by the throng as in the highest degree *wakan*.

*Pantheism* rests at the foundation of all the religion of the Dakotas. In strictness, it can hardly be called Pantheism, for they do not believe that the whole universe is but an expansion of *one* God, but that everything in the universe has its own spiritual essence or god. Yet for want of a better term (since *polytheism* is much too limited in its signification), I may be permitted to use it.

No one deity is held by them all as a superior object of worship. Some deem one thing or deity as *iyotan wakan*, or the supreme object of worship, whilst others reject this and substitute a different one as the main god. Thus, those Dakotas who belong to the Medicine Dance, esteem Unktehi as the greatest divinity. The western tribes neglect that deity, and pay their main devotion to Tunkan (*Inyan*), the Stone God, or *Lingam*. As a result of these differences of worship, an *apparent* skepticism arises on the ancient divinities among them, whilst a *real* skepticism exists as to their intrusive forms of religion. The Dakota, indeed, is not a creature that ignores reason. When the great men of the medicine dance assert that they have power to fly,

that they can cure disease by a word, can slay animals or men by a nod—the western Dakota smiles at their pretensions. The medicine dance is no part of his hereditary creed; he does not know these things to be true. His ancient faith, and the instructions of his early days, he clings to, but looks with suspicion upon these new ideas.

The radical *forms of worship* obtaining among the Dakotas are few and simple. One of the most primitive and ancient is that of "Woshnapi," or *sacrifice*. To every divinity that they worship, they make sacrifices. Upon recovery from sickness—upon the occurrence of a long-wished-for event, on disease appearing among a family or camp, and even upon the most trivial occasions—the gods are either thanked or supplicated by sacrifice. The religious idea it carries with it is at the foundation of all their ancient ceremonies, and shows itself even in the every-day life of the Dakota. The Wohduze or *Taboo* had its origin here; the Wiwanyag Wacipi, or *Sun Dance*, carries with it the idea; the Wakan Wohanpi, or Sacred Feast (Feast of the First-fruits), is a practical embodiment of it; and Hanmdepi, or God-seeking of the sterner western tribes, is but a form of *self-sacrifice*.

No Dakota, in his worship, neglects this ceremony. It enters into his religious thoughts by day and by night, in the midst of multitudes or alone on the prairie; and even upon the death bed their thoughts wander back to the teachings of their childhood and the sacrifices of their early days; and their last breath is spent, like the immortal Socrates, in ordering the fulfilment of their forgotten vows or in directing the final sacrifice for their own spirit.

The sacrifices made upon recovery from sickness are never composed of anything very valuable, for the poverty of the Indian will not permit this. Usually a small strip of muslin, or a piece of red cloth, a few skins of some animal, or other things of no great use or value, are employed.



Sometimes a pan or kettle is laid up for a sacrifice. But after a short time the end for which the sacrifice was made is attained, and it is removed. Those in need of such things as they see offered for sacrifice may take them for their own use, being careful to substitute some other article.

Perhaps the most common forms of sacrifice are those which are made in the hunt. Particular portions of each animal killed are held sacred to the god of the chase or other deities. If a deer is killed, the head, heart, or some other portion of it is sacrificed by the one who slays it. The part sacrificed differs with different individuals. In ducks and fowls the most common sacrifice is of the wing, though many sacrifice the heart, and a few the head.

This custom is called *wohduze*, and is always constant with individuals, *i. e.*, the same part is always sacrificed; yet there are a few experienced hunters who have mixed much with the whites, and who have learned to abandon this custom.

Of a like character with this *wohduze*, or special sacrifice, though disconnected from it, and instituted for a different purpose, is the *taboo*. It bears the name of *wohduze* (the same as that just described), but is by no means the same.

When a youth arrives at an age proper for going on the war path, he first purifies himself by fasting and the inipi or steam bath for the term of three days, and then goes, with tears in his eyes, to some medicine man, whose *wakan* influence is undoubted, and prays that he will present him with the *wotawe*, or consecrated armor. This medicine man is usually some old and experienced *zuya-wakan*, or sacred war-leader. After a time the armor—usually consisting of a *spear*, an *arrow*, and a small bundle of *paint*\*

\* It is a singular fact that nothing but the *spear* of this armor is ever used in battle, though it is always carried with them upon war parties.

—is presented to the young man; but until it is so presented, he must fast and continue his purifications incessantly.

At the same time that the old man presents the armor, he tells the youth to what animal it is dedicated, and enjoins it upon him to hold that animal sacred. He must never kill or harm it, even though starvation be upon him. At all times and under all circumstances the “taboo” or *sacred injunction* is upon it, until, by slaying numerous enemies it is gradually removed. By some the animal is held sacred during life, the *taboo* being voluntarily retained. Frequently they form images of this animal and carry about with them, regarding it as having a direct influence upon their every-day life and upon their ultimate destiny—a thing supernatural, all-powerful, and sacred.\*

Among the Algonquin tribes it is represented that each person had his *tutelar divinity*, and always carried some token of this divinity about with him.

Now, although our knowledge of the Algonquins is more complete than of any other North American race, yet the question may be asked whether these tutelary divinities and the image of the taboo are not one and the same thing? The Algonquins possessed sacred armor; and, if sacred, was it not dedicated to some object? and would not that object assume the same importance, in the eyes of the individuals possessing the armor so dedicated,

\* At various times the missionaries have endeavored to get the Sioux to sign the *temperance pledge*. They were all willing enough to touch the pen in token of signature, but no inducements could make them draw the figure of their *taboo*: for should they break such a pledge—a thing they were doubtless all looking to—it would be great sin, and call down the wrath of the *spirit of the taboo* upon them. Many, however, out of a desire to please would draw an animal for a signature, but not the true one of their own individual taboo.



as the spirit of the taboo does in the mind of the Dakota? It is certainly plausible.\*

Hand in hand with the sacrificial system, or, rather, one of its most prevalent forms, is the Wakan Wohanpi or Sacred Feast. Formerly no Dakota would partake of the first-fruits of the field or of the hunt without offering a part, by the Sacred Feast, to the deities: but, at the present day, these feasts are not confined wholly to this idea, but are made even upon trivial occasions. It must not be understood, however, that the practice of propitiating the deities, or thanking them by an offering of the *first-fruits*, has died out. On the contrary, it is in full force among them. Some are even so religious that they

\* I must here be permitted to hazard a conjecture as to the origin of the *totemic system* of the Algonquin and Huron-Iroquois races.

In each of the Okodakiciyapi or *secret societies* among the Dakota tribes, there is one object that is specially worshipped, and every member of any particular society of this kind holds the other members as brothers. In the *taboo* also one animal is the sacred object of many persons. Thus many Dakotas have the *wolf* for *taboo*; others have the lynx as a common god, to whom their war-spears are dedicated; and still other classes the *otter*, *fox*, *bear*, etc. There can be no doubt that the *Zuya Wakan*, who bestows these sacred animals as a *taboo* on the Dakotas, does so, at this day, at random. Yet, numerous persons, finding themselves with the same *taboo*, and esteeming the same animal *wakan*, would naturally unite into one society; and thus one common taboo would render them one common okodakiciyapi or family. This is further corroborated by the fact, that even in common life, where one Dakota takes another as his *koda*, *i. e.*, god, or friend, they become brothers in each other's families, and are, as such, of course unable to intermarry, thus corresponding with the *totemic system*, in which members of the same badge cannot marry. The *image of the taboo*, then, may be, at the same time, the *totem* of the Algonquin, and his supposed *tutelary divinity*; and it is not improbable that the totemic system had its origin here. It is true that non-intermarriage is not prohibited strictly in the okodakiciyapi of the Dakotas; but its exceedingly rudimentary state, as compared with the thorough and fundamental system of the Algonquins, will account for this.

will partake of no food without offering a portion to the divinities as a sacrifice.\* But the system has been extended, so that is by no means confined to the *first-fruits*, but is made upon every occasion. The touch of time is upon this, as upon all the customs of the race, and they are altered and debased. But the main idea stands prominent over all, notwithstanding the changes.

It is impossible to name all the deities to whom these Sacred Feasts are made. The most common offering is to the spirit of the medicine sack; and this, among the eastern Dakotas, has supplanted all the rest.

The inference has been made by some whites, who have carefully observed this ceremony, that, as the sacrifices to the evil divinities are mostly of a propitiatory character, and as the Sacred Feast appears to be more a ceremony of thanks than otherwise, it was originally intended for thanks to the Wakan Tanka, or Great Spirit. Yet the Dakotas do not now so understand it, nor, indeed, appear to know anything of its ordination.

*Hanmdepi* or God-Seeking is a form of religion among the Dakotas that bears within it very ancient footprints. The meaning of this word, in its common acceptation, appears to be greatly misunderstood by some. Literally, it means only *to dream*, and is but another form of the word *hanmna*: but in its use it is applied almost wholly to the custom of *seeking for a dream or revelation*, practised by the Sisitonwan, Ihanktonwanna, and Titonwan, Sioux, and by the Crows, Minnitarees, Assinaboines, and other western Dakotas. In this respect it has no reference whatever to the common dreams of sleep, but means simply the form of religion practised.

\* "Others again [Sioux] will never eat unless they bestow the first mouthful as an offering to the prairie."—*Sage's Western Scenes, Philadelphia: G. D. Miller, 1855, p. 81.*

If a Dakota desires to be particularly successful in any (to him) important undertaking, he first purifies himself by the *Inipi* or steam bath, and by fasting for a term of three days. During the whole of this time he avoids women and society, is secluded in his habits, and endeavors in every way to etherealize himself, preparatory to the performance of his religious rites, in order that he may be pure enough to receive a revelation from the deity he invokes. When the period of fasting is passed, he is ready for the sacrifice, which is made in various ways.

Some, passing a knife through the breast and arms, attach cords or thongs thereto, which are fastened at the other end to the top of a tall pole raised for the purpose, and thus they hang, suspended only by these cords, for two, three, and even four days, gazing upon vacancy, their minds intently fixed upon the object in which they desire to be assisted by the deity, and waiting for a vision from above. Once a day an assistant is sent to look upon the person thus sacrificing himself. If the deities have vouchsafed him a vision or revelation he signifies the same by motions, and is released at once: if he be silent, his silence is understood, and he is left alone to his barbarous reveries.

Others attach a buffalo hair rope to the head of a buffalo just as it is severed from the animal, and to the other end affix a hook which is then passed through the large muscles in the small of the back, and thus fastened they drag the head all over the camp, their minds meanwhile being fixed intently, as in the first instance, upon the object in which they are beseeching the deity to assist them.

A third class pass knives through the flesh in various parts of the body, and wait in silence, though with fixed mind, for a dream or revelation.

A few, either not blessed with the powers of endurance or else lacking the courage of the class first named, will plant a pole upon the steep bank of a stream, and attaching



ropes to the muscles of the arms and breast, as in the first instance, will stand, but not hang, gazing into space, without food or drink, for days.

Still another class of these *faquirs* practise the Hanmdepi without such horrid self-sacrifice. For weeks—nay, for months—they will fix their minds intently upon any desired object to the exclusion of all others, frequently crying about the camp, occasionally taking a little food but fasting for the most part, and earnestly seeking a revelation from their god.

The sufferings they undergo in these self-torturings are excruciating. In the first instances, particularly, the overpowering thirst, the change from the heat of day to the cold dews of night, the gnawings of hunger, and the inflamed muscles, all produce sufferings with which even death is not a comparison. No Hindoo devotees could be more earnest or sincere in their self-immolation than these poor Dakotas in their Hanmdepi. They practise these ceremonies daily. Among the eastern Dakotas the Medicine Dance appears to have taken the place of these more barbarous ceremonies—among the Winnebagoes, entirely. Indeed, the Medicine Dance, though an intrusive religious form, may be considered as an elevating and enlightening religion in comparison with the Hanmdepi. That this barbarous religious ceremony is even now commencing to fall away, under the combined influence of contact with the white man and intrusive religions, is very evident; and a century or even half a century hence, it will most likely be numbered with the dead customs.

The Wiwanyag Wacipi or *Worship of the Sun* as a divinity, is evidently one of the most radical bases of Dakota religion. It has a subordinate origin in the Wihanmnapi or *dreaming*, and is intimately connected with Hanmdepi or *Vision Hunting*. This most ancient of all worships, though it is of very frequent occurrence among the Da-

kotas, does not take place at stated intervals as among the old nations of the East, nor does the whole tribe participate in the ceremonies. It is performed by one person alone, such of his relatives or friends assisting in the ceremonies as may deem fit or as he may designate.

Preparatory to this, as to all the other sacred ceremonies of the Dakotas, is fasting and purification. The Dance commences with the rising of the sun and continues for three days, or until such time as the dreaming worshipper shall receive a vision from the spirit or divinity of the Sun. He faces the sun constantly, turning as it turns, and keeping up a constant blowing with a wooden whistle. A rude drum is beaten at intervals, to which he keeps time with his feet, raising one after the other, and bending his body towards the sun. Short intervals of rest are given during the dance. The mind of the worshipper is fixed intently upon some great desire that he has, and is, as it were, isolated from the body. In this state they are said to receive revelations from the sun, and to hold direct intercourse with that deity.

If the worshipper of this luminary, however, should fail to receive the desired revelation before the close of the ceremonies, then self-sacrifice is resorted to, and the ceremonies of the *Hanmdepi* become a part of the worship of the Sun.

Yet, in all the sacrifices of the Dakotas, we find no such barbarous offerings as were made by the ancient Egyptians, Persians, Assyrians, Greeks, Romans, and by the old Peruvians and Aztecs. Human sacrifices form no part of their religion. In this respect the barbarism of the West presents a nobler history than that of the East. Only one instance is on record,\* in the whole history of Dakota

\* The sacrifice of a son by his own father, mentioned in *Schoolcraft's Condition and Prospects*, IV., 51, as occurring among the Sioux, is be-



nations, where such a sacrifice was offered. This was among the Pawnees. A young Sioux girl who had been taken captive by that nation was put to death by holding fire under her arms and feet, and her body, still quivering, was then cut into small pieces. From each of these pieces a drop of blood was squeezed over their cornfields as a sacrifice to the god of the harvest. Yet the Dakotas look upon such actions with horror, even where the sacrifice is in the person of an enemy. The slaying of enemies in war may, indeed, be regarded as a sort of sacrifice; but the deliberate sacrifice of a prisoner as a form of religion is not a custom among them. They usually adopt prisoners into the nation and treat them kindly.

Nor do we find that bigoted attachment to one form of religion and suspicion of all others, so common even among Christian nations. Their hereditary religion they cling to with tenacity, and a generous skepticism arises with regard to the intrusive forms of religion among them. But those who adopt these last they never persecute nor ostracize. They are *tolerant*, but *jealous*. This last word, indeed, accounts for their hostility to those who have embraced Christianity. They can tolerate, but they dread encroachments which overturn *all* their religion.

The deities upon which the most worship is bestowed, if, indeed, any particular one is nameable, are Tunkan (*Inyan*) the *Stone God*, and Wakinyan the *Thunder Bird*. The latter, as being the main god of war, receives constant worship and sacrifice; whilst the adoration of the former is an every-day affair. The *Tunkan*, the Dakotas say, is the god that dwells in stones or rocks, and is the *oldest* god.

lied—if, indeed, the thing ever took place—to be the only instance ever known among them. It must be looked upon, as the Sioux themselves look upon any such transaction when spoken of to them, as an instance of insanity, and consequently hardly worth mentioning. Certainly nothing could be farther from their customs.

If asked why it is considered the oldest, they will tell you because it is the *hardest*—an Indian's reason. The most usual form of stone employed in worship is round, and about the size of the human head. The devout Dakota paints this *Tunkan* red, putting colored swan's down upon it, and then falls down and worships the god which is supposed to dwell in it or to hover near it.

What the general belief of the Dakotas is with regard to the resurrection of the body, I am unable to ascertain. The old Peruvians—who bear more than one sign in their language, manners, customs, and religion, of a co-origin with the Dakotas—had their *mummies* or a preservation of the body with a view to resurrection, but they were a fixed nation and could do so. Had the Dakota nations been localized in the same manner, perhaps the same thing would have occurred among them.\*

There are those among the Dakotas who profess to believe in the doctrine of *transmigration*, or the passage of the soul after death into the body of some animal. It is this class that give a *fifth* soul to man. Some few of these metempsychosists even go so far as to aver that they have distinct recollections of a former state of existence, and of the passage into this. The belief, as before stated, does not appear to be general.

In the worship of their deities *paint* forms an important feature. *Scarlet* or *red* is the religious color for sacrifices, whilst *blue* is used by the women in many of the ceremonies in which they participate. This, however, is not a constant distinction of sex—for the women frequently use red and scarlet. The use of paints, the Dakotas aver, was taught

\* The placing of dead bodies on scaffolds—a temporary preservation of them—seems to have the same object in view, as far as their mode of life admits of it. Acquaintance with the Dakotas shows that they have an hereditary and universal opposition to burying their dead under ground until it is absolutely necessary, from the rapidity of decay, to do so.

them by the gods. *Unktehi* taught the first medicine men how to paint themselves when they worshipped him, and what colors to use. *Takushkanshkan* (the Moving God) whispers to his favorites what colors are most acceptable to him. Heyoka hovers over them in dreams, and informs them how many streaks to employ upon their bodies, and the tinge they must have. No ceremony of worship is complete without the *wakan* or sacred application of paint. The down of the female swan is colored scarlet, and forms a necessary part of sacrifices.

The *tunkan* is painted red, as a sign of active worship,\* and the Dakota brave is never more particular in the choice of paints which may please his deities than when upon the war path.

There are no set seasons or times of worship. Each Dakota prays to his gods or makes sacrifices to them at such times and in such places as he deems best. In most cases, circumstances call forth his active religion, which otherwise lies dormant. Dreams are a main source. A brave dreams repeatedly or vividly of the sun, and straightway he conceives it to be his duty to worship that luminary by a Sun Dance. Death makes its appearance in a family, and immediately the Dakota must propitiate the spirits of darkness by fasting and sacrifice. The wants of the Indian, also, are a prime source of his active religion. One wishes to be successful in stealing horses or upon the war path, and falls to begging the assistance of the deities by self-sacrifice, preceded by fasting, penance, and purification.

That there was a time with them when all these radical

\* Speaking of the modern Hindoo temples of worship, Bayard Taylor says: "Some of the figures have been recently smeared with *red paint*, a sign that they are still worshipped by some of the Hindoo sects."

—*India, China, and Japan, Chapter III.*

forms of religion had a positive, and not a negative, existence, were active and constant instead of latent and only called out by circumstances, there can be no good grounds for doubting. The internal proofs are too strong to admit of doubt. At the present day, though the religious sentiment among them is potent in the chase, the dances, the games, and upon the war path, the last-named alone, probably, develops it in its true force. The dangerous positions they may at any moment be forced into, the gloomy forest and the lonely prairie, the strange country and the approaching conflict, all combine to cast a dark shade over them, favorable to active religion. At other times circumstances, alone, call them to their rites and ceremonies.

It is remarkable that the idea of purification should be so deeply rooted in the mind of the Dakota. It is as strong in them as it was in the ancient Hebrews. Their entire religion is pervaded with it. In all sacred ceremonies, where fire is used, they kindle anew, for purification, with flint and steel, or by friction. The body, too, must be prepared for interview with deity; and for a Dakota to commence any religious ceremony without having first purified himself by the *inipi*, or steam bath, and by fasting, would be the height of iniquity. They appear, indeed, to approach sacred things with the same awe that the ancient Jews experienced coming near the chamber of the Holy of Holies; and the injunction, "Take off thy sandals—this is holy ground," seems ever before them.

The idea of *evil*, also, seems to be deeply rooted in their minds. It pervades all their opinions, sentiments, and beliefs. It may be asked, from whence did it spring? The solution (if it would be wise to venture a solution) would apparently take us back to a time when they possessed a religion purer than that which their present forms exhibit.



No other inference is left us. To use Dr. Paley's old figure—if a person finds a broken watch, he does not abuse his reason by imagining that it was always so. Debasement pre-supposes at least comparative purity. What, then, is the case with the religion of the Dakotas? We find two principles pervading it all, the one of good, and the other of evil. The principle of good has been uncultivated until it has become so far debased that the name of God even has lost its original use, and is employed as a form of address among them; while the principle of evil has been cultivated and extended until it pervades all their philosophy, and enters even into the commonest phases of their life. Good is always negative, whilst evil is always positive. I can name no divinity of Good among the Dakotas except the Wakan Tanka, or *Great Spirit*. None of their other deities are represented as possessing even negative good. If this, then, be so, the conclusion may be drawn that the Dakotas originally believed in *one God*; but that the evil principle, which was ever present with them, and of the existence of which they had daily evidence among themselves, as they supposed, in disease, sorrow, and death, was the origin of that plurality of evil divinities which is found among them, perpetuated, perhaps, by the traditions which they originally brought with them from the parent stem.

Summing up the religion of the Dakotas, we find *Pantheism* is the great base upon which it stands, and two radical forms connected with it in the *worship of the sun*, and Hanmdepi or *God-seeking*. All their other religious customs and dances are mere *forms* of worship.

At the root of all these forms, stand two prominent ideas—*purification* and *sacrifice*, and from them is built up the whole external structure.

Constructed, then, Dakota religion stands thus:—

*Main Base.*

PANTHEISM.

*Derivative Bases.*

WIWANYAG WACIPI, OR SUN WORSHIP.

HANMDEPI, OR GOD-SEEKING.

*Base Forms.*

PURIFICATION.

SACRIFICE.

These constitute the whole religion of the Dakotas.

It will be observed that I have paid no attention whatever to the Medicine Dance, the Circle Dance, or the Brave Dance in this analytic view of the Dakota theology. As a part of the *present* religious ceremonies of the Winnebagoes, eastern Sioux, and a few other Dakotas, these dances are, perhaps, worthy of consideration; but, as they are *intrusive forms*, they cannot be considered as entering into the radical and native, as well as prevailing, religion of the race. An analysis of the religion of the Medicine and Circle Dances, belongs properly to a history of the nation and race to which those dances are clearly traceable; and the Brave Dance forms but a very inconsiderable fraction of the religion of the Dakotas. Neither does it contain any other ideas, or even forms of worship than those embraced in the table just given.

Nor have I found, in observing the religious ceremonies of the Dakotas, that the Medicine Dance exercises that powerful influence over this people which some have ascribed to it. In cases of extremity, I have ever noticed that they appeal to their *Tunkan* (Stone God), first and last, and they do this even after the ceremonies of the Medicine Dance

have been gone through with. All Sioux agree in saying that the *Tunkan* is the main recipient of their prayers; and among the Titons, Mandans, Ithanktons and Western Dakotas, they pray to that and the spirit of the buffalo almost entirely.





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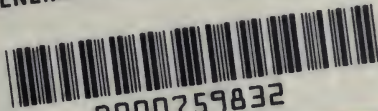
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